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3-6-2015

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Recommended Citation

Baart, Aaron, "Church and Homosexuality" (2015). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. Paper 183.
http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/183

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Church and Homosexuality

Abstract

"How do we present a Biblical interpretation of this issue while remaining true to the grace that covers us all?"

Posting about the Church and homosexuality from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/answering-your-question-the-church-and-homosexuality/>

Keywords

In All Things, Answering Your Question, Good Samaritan, homosexuality, church, Jesus

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Answering Your Question: The Church and Homosexuality

 inallthings.org/answering-your-question-the-church-and-homosexuality/

Aaron Baart

We are going to have a discussion in our small group regarding the issue of homosexuality and the church's view towards their place in church leadership, i.e., as pastors, elders, deacons, etc. It is easy to 'pick out' various scriptures that support personal views. How do we/I present a Biblical interpretation of this issue while remaining true to the grace that covers us all?—Rich

Rich, thanks for your searching question. It's an important one today that many in the Church are asking. I appreciate that you bring up the importance of a responsible Biblical reading to help inform us. Let's start there.

One of the riches of the Reformational tradition in Christianity is its emphasis on searching the whole of Scripture, even when addressing a specific topic. This means that when studying a topic like homosexuality, there is much more to consider in a healthy Biblical hermeneutic than just the six specific passages that come up in a word search for "homosexuality" in a concordance. In fact, **often resolution and instruction that speak into the stickiest of Biblical quandaries are found in the broader scope of Scripture, in what I would call, the trajectories.**

For example, with the arrival of Pentecost, Acts 2 assumes an unfolding drama that will continue far beyond the close of the canon, let alone the chapter. In this approach, we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture but we also find faithful ways of responsibly applying the ancient text to our present situation. In fact, much of Scripture, in both the Old and New Testaments, envision a fuller picture of the Kingdom of God in this world as eternity breaks into the present. This occurs whenever God's people move more fully toward his picture of shalom for all of Creation.

Here is another specific example as to how a particular text can offer a trajectory for God's people well beyond its immediate context:

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, two key points are often overlooked but necessary for reflection today more than ever. First, Jesus tells the story in answer to an inquiry from an expert in the law who asks, "What must I do to inherit eternal life" (Luke 10:25)? What follows isn't merely a story about how nice people act, despite the passage typically being taught that way; it's a story that answers a question about *eternal life*—painting a picture of what heaven looks like when it breaks into the present. The second point that's often overlooked is that niceness and being neighborly misses the point. The stakes are much higher than that!

The parable of the Good Samaritan is truly about heaven breaking into earth in the interactions between people who see the world very differently. According to Jesus, eternal life breaking into the present looks like kindness-without-question extended toward those we don't readily associate or find affinity with. For many Christians, people of differing sexual attraction likely fit into the category of those we don't easily relate to (even typically avoid, if we're honest with ourselves).

In Jesus's parable, the Good Samaritan doesn't first inquire of the hurting man to find out what he believes, how he lives, his religious worship style preferences, or his sexual orientation. In fact, the most significant point made about kindness in the story is that the **Good Samaritan extends compassion without regard for his own safety, reputation, or agenda**. The Good Samaritan loves across social boundaries with the kind of world-changing enemy-love so often evident in Jesus' depictions of the Kingdom of God (e.g. Matthew 5:43-48).

Yes, the Church today needs to study the Scriptures concerning homosexuality. But not just the six "concordance" passages. And not even because we need to find the right answer to our questions. **Truly, we need a fresh approach to the discussion because too quickly, we act like finding the right answer is the only objective**. Sadly, throughout history, we Christians have run over many a person in our righteous quest for truth. Sometimes this causes us to lose our audience along the way, only to celebrate our victories in the echo chamber of the Church, oblivious to those left in our wake.

It's often been said that might doesn't make right. However, consider the reverse as well: **right doesn't always justify might, either**. As a favorite professor of mine in seminary, Rikk Watts, always used to say, **"What if, in the end, Jesus is as interested in us being good as he is in us being right?"**

In other words, we would do well to consider the process involved in discussing potentially divisive issues within the church as well as the *outcome*. Moreover, tending to the process always must precede preoccupation with the outcome. Right answers aren't the only thing we are after because *how* we arrive at our answers also sends a significant message, a message sometime even more convincing than the answer. Neighbor-love and even enemy-love, on the way to a conclusion, must be part of the Biblical discussion.

Now, please, hear what I'm saying and what I'm not saying. Does Jesus want us to strive for truth? Yes. Should we be willing to take stands on issues in the world, even if it means finding ourselves peculiar in the eyes of our broader culture? Without a doubt.

So, in an effort to refresh the gracefulness of our conversations a bit, here are a few practical ideas for how we could frame them a little better:

Find ways to state your ideas in humility. Can we talk in such a way that if we found out years later that we were wrong in our position on homosexuality (one way or the other), that we wouldn't be embarrassed for our old self?

Speak about people as if they were in the room with you. How would they feel about the way you are talking about them? Honored? Like a fellow image-bearer?

Reach out in love. Invite someone who is same-sex attracted to talk with you and ask them what it actually feels like to be Christian and gay at the same time. Jesus demonstrated a great ability to listen well (which is a profound act when you consider the knowledge he quietly held within).

Place the issue in broader context. For every discussion in Church and especially for potentially contentious ones, we should ask, why are we talking about this sin or this issue rather than other issues facing the Church today? Are we giving it undue attention? Not enough? Why or why not?

No one cares how much you know unless they know how much you care. It's the golden rule of pastoral care. What would it take for someone to feel so loved by you that they didn't lose sight of your love and care for them, even if you disagreed on any number of issues?

I can sincerely appreciate that Christians want to discuss whether or not gay people should be involved in leadership positions in the church when we talk about homosexuality. Given how this issue is currently moving in the broader culture, it's a valid question to discuss. However, I don't think we've properly

delineated the most necessary questions to ask, or the order in which to ask them, in this discussion. Observing Jesus's interactions in the Gospels with those he met, I notice a consistent progression that moves from a) compassion and care to b) healing and restoration to c) sending forth.

On the issue of homosexuality, **the Church has too often leapfrogged Jesus's first step of care and compassion for all who are hurting.** Re-establishing the right order of approach to the discussion is vital because it relieves us of the typical trap of binary thinking that quickly ensues between speaking truth and living in grace. Indeed, both grace and truth are needed. However, the order of their application matters greatly as it helps us to have conversations *with* people, not just *about* them. **Grace earns its audience and the ability to speak truth.** It allows us to reclaim an approach Jesus demonstrated when interacting with those in society's margins. Consider the story of Jesus's defense and interaction with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11).

Whenever the Church either abdicates its role in caring or even begins with anything else, it loses its relevance and voice in everything that follows. When this occurs, people no longer believe we are for them. Rather, we become the enemy. The broader cultural perception toward Christians on the topic of homosexuality testifies to this reality. That is why discussions surrounding Church leadership should be placed into the third sequential category of sending forth—a legitimate discussion, to be sure—just one that will prove more fruitful if we tend well to the discussions that must precede it.